

Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis is a set of psychological and psychotherapeutic theories and techniques created by the Jewish physician Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939). While often considered to be pseudoscientific, psychoanalytic theories have had enormous influence, such as by being one of the inspirations for Cultural Marxism.

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Criticisms

Pseudoscience

Psychoanalysis has progressively moved towards the fringes of mental health care.^[1] Its usefulness as a technique has not been demonstrated.^[2] The theoretical foundations of psychoanalysis lay in the same philosophical currents that lead to interpretive phenomenology rather than in those that lead to scientific positivism, making the theory largely incompatible with scientific approaches to the study of the mind.^[3]

Hans Eysenck has argued that Freud set back the study of psychology and psychiatry "*by something like fifty years or more*."^[4]

E. Fuller Torrey, writing in *Witchdoctors and Psychiatrists* (1986), stated that psychoanalytic theories have no more scientific basis than the theories of traditional native healers, "witchdoctors", or modern "cult" New Age alternatives such as Erhard Seminars Training.^[5]

Frank Cioffi, author of *Freud and the Question of Pseudoscience*, has stated that *"The strongest reason for considering Freud a pseudo-scientist is that he claimed to have tested – and thus to have provided the most cogent grounds for accepting – theories which are either untestable or even if testable had not been tested. It is spurious claims to have tested an untestable or untested theory which are the most pertinent grounds for deeming Freud and his followers pseudoscientists"*.^[6]

Cognitive scientists have also criticized psychoanalysis. Linguist Noam Chomsky has criticized psychoanalysis for lacking a scientific basis.^[7] Steven Pinker considered Freudian theory unscientific for understanding the mind.^[8] Evolutionary biologist Steven Jay Gould considered psychoanalysis as influenced by pseudoscientific theories such as recapitulation theory. Evolutionary psychologist Kevin B. MacDonald^[9] as well as psychologists Hans Eysenck^[10] and John F. Kihlstrom^[11] have also criticized the field as pseudoscience.

Karl Popper argued that psychoanalysis is a pseudoscience because its claims are not testable and cannot be refuted; that is, they are not falsifiable.^[12] Adolf Grünbaum argues that psychoanalytic based theories are falsifiable, but that the causal claims of psychoanalysis are unsupported by the available clinical evidence.^[13] Martin Seligman wrote that *"Thirty years ago, the cognitive revolution in psychology overthrew both Freud and the behaviorists, at least in academia."*^[14]

Also many individuals influenced by psychoanalysis have criticized aspects of it. Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze claimed that the institution of psychoanalysis has become a center of power and that its confessional techniques resemble the Christian tradition.^[15] Jacques Lacan criticized the emphasis of some American and British psychoanalytical traditions on what he has viewed as the suggestion of imaginary "causes" for symptoms, and recommended the return to Freud.^[16] Together with Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari criticised the Oedipal structure.^[17] Luce Irigaray criticised psychoanalysis, employing Jacques Derrida's concept of phallogocentrism to describe the exclusion of the woman from Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical theories.^[18] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in their 1972 work *Anti-Œdipus*, take the cases of Gérard Mendel, Bela Grunberger and Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, prominent members of the most respected associations (IPa), to suggest that, traditionally, psychoanalysis enthusiastically embraces a police state.^[19]

Sacred status of Freud's writings and status of psychoanalysts depending on the "line of descent" back to Freud

One example of the pseudoscientific nature of psychoanalysis is argued to be the sacred status given to the writings of Freud. They continue to be standard texts in psychoanalytic training programs and to be extensively cited in psychoanalytic journals, while writings by others is given much less weight, which is argued to more resemble a cult than a continually developing scientific program. Another example is the status of a psychoanalyst depending on his, and his trainer's, "line of descent" back to Freud.^[20]

Fabrications and frauds

More recent critics have argued that Freud was not simply lacking in scientific rigor, but throughout his career systematically fabricated and falsified evidence, in order to support his theories.^[21]

Cocaine

In an article published in July 1884, Freud promoted cocaine and recommended it for ailments as diverse as digestive disorders, seasickness, mental fatigue, nerve pains, asthma, and impotence. He also recommended it as a cure for morphine addiction and falsely claimed to have cured a patient using this method, despite knowing that "the cure" had instead caused a double addiction and great suffering.^[21]

"The unconscious"

"The unconscious", as well as related concepts such as the "id" and the "superego", are important parts of psychoanalytic theory. These parts of the mind are seen as semi-independent entities that are largely directly inaccessible for the "conscious mind", but may cause various psychological problems for a person, such as by repressed traumatic memories. Various hints of what is supposedly occurring in "the unconscious" are provided to a person (and his psychoanalyst) by phenomena such as dreams, "Freudian slips", transference processes, and so on.

Critics have not denied the existence of many important subconscious processes, emotions, instincts, and learning processes (such as classical and operational conditioning), but argue that there is no empirical evidence for the existence of the semi-independent parts of the mind claimed by psychoanalytic theory. The existence of repressed memories is highly controversial and even if existing does not prove the existence of the psychoanalytic concepts supposedly involved in "the unconscious".

Pornography and sexualization

Part of the appeal of psychoanalysis may have been its shocking sexual claims.^[20] Freud's wife viewed psychoanalysis as a form of pornography.^[22]

Another criticism is a psychoanalytic tendency to interpret everything as related to a primitive, biological sexual drive and to repression/"sublimation" of this sexual drive caused by society. Thus love, conscience, religion, and civilization itself are all interpreted as due to repressions/"sublimations". Critics have argued that empirical science have demonstrated that there are other biological systems and that, for example, pair bonding and conscientiousness have been evolutionarily selected for and have biological/genetic bases.^[23]

Psychosexual stages

The supposed different psychosexual stages during development (the oral, the anal, the phallic, the latent, and the genital stage), and that are claimed to be related to various psychological problems, have been criticized as lacking empirical support.^[24]

"Oedipus complex"

Incest between siblings and parents-children is and has always been almost universally forbidden in all cultures ("incest taboo"). Exceptions include some royal dynasties who were seen as gods. A similar avoidance is seen in many animal species. This has been argued to be caused by a genetically determined instinct against sex between persons who live in close domestic proximity during the first few years of their lives. This effect is called the Westermarck effect, after the Finnish scientist Edvard Westermarck. The effect has received empirical support in studies. Smell and other characteristics may also be involved in determining if another individual is very closely genetically related or not.^{[25][26]}

In contrast, Freud argued that the incest taboo is merely a social construct and that children actually want to have sexual relations with the parent of the opposite sex ("Oedipus complex"). Critics have argued that empirical evidence for this is lacking. Steven Pinker has argued that *"The idea that boys want to sleep with their mothers strikes most men as the silliest thing they have ever heard. Obviously, it did not seem so to Freud, who wrote that as a boy he once*

had an erotic reaction to watching his mother dressing. But Freud had a wet-nurse, and may not have experienced the early intimacy that would have tipped off his perceptual system that Mrs. Freud was his mother. The Westermarck theory has out-Freuded Freud."^[27]

Freud has been accused of having had a "pathological" obsession with incest and the Oedipus complex.^[28]

Psychologist Alice Miller charged psychoanalysis with being similar to the poisonous pedagogies, which she described in her book *For Your Own Good*. She scrutinized and rejected the validity of Freud's drive theory, including the Oedipus complex, which, according to her and Jeffrey Masson, blames the child for the abusive sexual behavior of adults.^[29]

Misogyny

Various aspects of psychoanalytic theories, such as the supposed female "penis envy", have been criticized as misogynistic. Also other views and actions by Freud have been similarly criticized.^[30]

Clinical cases as alleged evidence

Critics of psychoanalysis argued that its theories are based too little or not all on quantitative and experimental research, and too much or exclusively on alleged evidence from clinical cases.

Critics have also argued that Freud's theoretical models arouse from a very limited and unrepresentative sample of patient cases—almost exclusively upper-class Austrian women of the late 19th century. This is not a group representative of the general population.

Effectiveness of psychoanalytic and psychodynamic therapy

Freud has been accused of systematic fraud and outright fabrications of patient case histories and therapeutic outcomes. Freud claimed to have cured 18 patients as proof that his theories could be successfully applied. This has been criticized and closer inspection is argued to show that Freud was a charlatan, who failed to cure a single patient.^{[21][28][20]}

Another criticism is that Freud completely misdiagnosed patients that suffered from conditions unrelated to psychoanalysis; for instance, the famous patient Anna O has been argued to have suffered from tuberculosis affecting the brain and not the "hysteria" claimed by Freud.^[31]

More generally, psychoanalytic psychotherapy as proscribed by Freud has been criticized as lacking proven efficiency or even being harmful, as indicated by large numbers of suicides by patients of Freud and other early psychoanalysts, as well as by many suicides among the early psychoanalysts themselves.

Other criticisms include traditional psychoanalysis often consisting of intense psychotherapy during a long time period. This, in combination with there being few psychoanalysts, due to demands such as only accepting physicians as psychoanalysts, made traditional long term psychoanalytic psychotherapy very expensive and something of a luxury indulgence for the wealthy, which however may have contributed to its glamor.

A French 2004 report stated that psychoanalytic therapy is far less effective than other psychotherapies (including cognitive behavioral therapy). It used a meta-analysis of numerous other studies to find whether the treatment was "proven" or "presumed" to be effective on different diseases.^[32] A 2001 systematic review of the medical literature by the Cochrane Collaboration concluded that no data exist demonstrating that psychodynamic psychotherapy is effective in treating schizophrenia and severe mental illness.^[33]

Numerous studies have shown that its efficacy is related to the quality of the therapist, rather than the psychoanalytic school or technique or training.^[34] This can be seen as supporting that it is not particular psychoanalytic therapies that are responsible for possible positive effects, but instead non-psychoanalytic therapist variables, such as being a good listener.

Various "psychodynamic" psychotherapies influenced by traditional psychoanalytic psychotherapy have been developed. However, they often differ markedly in many ways from traditional psychoanalysis, such as by the duration being much shorter. Studies published in scientific journals have sometimes found positive effects of such psychotherapies. One criticism of such results is that such positive effects are not due to the psychoanalytic element, but due to placebo effects, due to effects common to all talk psychotherapies (due to effects such as from the patient receiving positive attention), and/or due to these psychotherapies in practice having many similarities with therapies with a more scientific basis, such as cognitive/behavioral psychotherapies.

Psychoanalysis as a replacement for religious confession

Psychoanalysis has been seen as a replacement, in an increasingly secular society, for religious confession (either to a priest or to God directly), which is one explanation for its popularity.^[35]

Criticisms as proving of the truths of psychoanalysis and the pathology of the critics

"A particularly egregious tendency is to interpret patient resistance and distress as an indication of the truth of psychoanalytic claims. Of course, patients were not the only ones who resisted psychoanalysis, and all other forms of resistance were similarly an indication of the truth of psychoanalysis. As Freud himself noted, "I am met with hostility and live in such isolation that one must suppose I had discovered the greatest truths" (in Bonaparte, Freud & Kris 1957, 163). As we shall see, resistance to psychoanalytic "truth" on the part of patients, deviating psychoanalysts, and even entire cultures was viewed as a sure sign of the truth of psychoanalysis and the pathology of those who resisted."^[20]

The movement as a religious/political movement

The psychoanalytic movement, especially initially, has been argued to be more similar to a religious or political movement than to science. *"In a real science there are no central organizations that function to ensure doctrinal conformity, expel those who deviate from the accepted truth, and present a united front to the world. It has long been apparent to observers, however, that this is exactly what psychoanalysis has done and continues to do."*^[23]

Freud thus created a secret Committee, *"a tight, small organization of loyalists" whose main task was to prevent departures from orthodoxy*. *"By insisting the Committee must be absolutely secret, Freud enshrined the principle of confidentiality. The various psychoanalytic societies that emerged from the Committee were like Communist cells, in which the members vowed eternal obedience to their leader. Psychoanalysis became institutionalized by the founding of journals and the training of candidates; in short an extraordinarily effective political entity."* *"This authoritarian aspect of the movement continued long after the dissolution of the secret Committee and long after Freud's death. Anna Freud received a ring from her father and kept a "special group" around her whose existence was not public knowledge."*^[20]

"Crews (1993, 56) also describes a "scarcely believable" case in which Freud manipulated Horace Frink, president of the New York Psychoanalytic Society, into a disastrous divorce and remarriage to an heiress, the latter event to be accompanied by a sizable financial contribution to the psychoanalytic movement."^[20]

Psychoanalytic offshoots

In several cases, individuals and groups considered heretical were expelled from the mainstream orthodoxy. However, these offshoots are argued to then have replicated the fundamental pseudoscientific structure of the mainstream orthodoxy. This again resembles the sectarian divisions within a religious or political movement.^[20]

American Psychiatric Association

In the United States, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) was over many years primarily led by psychoanalysts. *"The APA has supported the American Psychoanalytic Society in many ways directly and indirectly. The intellectual credibility of psychoanalysis within the wider psychiatric community and a considerable portion of its financial resources have therefore been achieved not by developing a body of scientific research or even being open to alternative perspectives, but by political influence within the APA."*^[20]

The psychoanalytic movement and the cultural/political left

"There is in fact a very long association between psychoanalysis and the political and cultural left. Support of radical and Marxist ideals was common among Freud's early followers. Leftist attitudes have been common in later years among psychoanalysts (Hale 1995, 31; Kurzweil 1989, 36, 284), among the groups in Berlin and Vienna during the post-World War I era (Kurzweil 1989; 46-47), in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union where all of the top psychoanalysts were Bolsheviks and Trotsky supporters and were among the most powerful political figures in the country (Chamberlain 1995), and in America from the 1920's to the present (Torrey 1992, 33, 93ff; 122-123). Given the institutional structure of psychoanalysis as an authoritarian political movement, one is left with the conclusion that one of the century's major intellectual and cultural forces was in fact a highly disciplined political movement masquerading as science."^[23]

"The apex of the association between Marxism and psychoanalysis came in the 1920s in the Soviet Union, where all the top psychoanalysts were Bolsheviks, Trotsky supporters, and among the most powerful political figures in the country (see Chamberlain 1995). (Trotsky himself was an ardent enthusiast of psychoanalysis.) This group organized a government-sponsored State Psychoanalytical Institute and developed a program of "pedology" aimed at producing the "new Soviet man" on the basis of psychoanalytic principles applied to the education of children. The program, which encouraged sexual precocity in children, was put into practice in state-run schools."^[20]

Sexuality and the Western civilization

Freud viewed repression of sexuality in Western civilization (in particular due to the Catholic Church) as an important cause of psychological disorders and unhappiness in the Western world. As such, psychoanalytic theories were embraced by leftist critics of Western civilization and had a large influence on the 1960s counter-culture, the sexual revolution, and Cultural Marxism.^[23]

Kevin MacDonald has argued that the traditional sexual morals encouraged monogamous marriages and high-investment parenting and that their breakdown as encouraged by the psychoanalytic movement has contributed to harmful effects such as increasing prevalence of low-investment parenting.^[20]

Other influences

"Freud's countercultural writings scarcely exhaust the mischief wreaked by psychoanalysis. The works of Herbert Marcuse, Norman Brown, Wilhelm Reich, Jaques Lacan, Erich Fromm and a host of neo-Freudians come to mind immediately, but this barely scratches the surface. Psychoanalysis influenced thought in a wide range of areas, including sociology, child rearing, criminology, anthropology, literary criticism, art, literature, and the popular media such as TV and the movies to the point that, as Kurzweil (1989, p. 102) notes, 'something like a culture of psychoanalysis was being established.' E. F. Torrey (1992, p. 37) describes in some detail the spread of the movement in the United States, originally through the actions of a small group of activists with access to the popular media, the academic world, and the arts, to a pervasive influence in the 1950's. 'It is a long road from a beachhead among New York intellectuals to a widespread influence in almost every phase of American life. Literature, drama, anthropology, sociology, child rearing, education, criminology, and many other parts of American thought and culture were to become permeated by Freud.'"^[23]

"Torrey studied 21 elite American intellectuals identified originally by Kadushin (1974) on the basis of peer ratings as being the most influential. Of the 21, 15 were Jewish, and questionnaires and analysis of the writings of these 15 indicated that 11 had been "significantly influenced by Freudian theory at some point in their careers".^[20]

Jewish involvement

The psychoanalytic movement has been described as having had a very large Jewish influence. Freud was a Zionist and described himself as "*a fanatical Jew*". In 1906, all 17 members of the movement were Jewish and they strongly identified as Jews. A 1971 study found that 62.1% of a sample of American psychoanalysts identified themselves as having a Jewish cultural affinity (and the percentage with Jewish background may have been even higher). Kevin MacDonald has argued for parts of the movement as being a manifestation of a Jewish group evolutionary strategy.^[20]

Jewish influence in the popular media, the academic world, and the arts has been argued to explain how psychoanalysis could gain its pervasive influence.^[20]

Freud has been described as a Jewish supremacist who viewed Jews as an ethically, spiritually, and intellectually superior group, who expressed feelings of "*racial kinship*" towards other Jews and "*racial strangeness*" towards non-Jews, and who made statement such as other Jews more easily understanding psychoanalysis due to their "*racial kinship*" with Freud. He has been argued to have viewed himself as a Jewish hero and psychoanalysis as a mechanism that would end anti-Semitism by freeing the world of the neuroses produced by a sexually repressive Western civilization.^[20]

However, in his public statements and writings Freud is argued to have concealed the strong Jewish identity revealed in, for example, his private letters. He is also argued to have given a few non-Jews very prominent public positions in the movement, in order to conceal the extent of Jewish involvement and increase the movement's appeal to non-Jews.^[20]

See also

- Carl Jung
- Political abuse of psychiatry
- Wilhelm Reich

External links

- Freud's Follies: Psychoanalysis as religion, cult, and political movement (<https://web.csulb.edu/~kmacd/paper-CrewsFreud.html>) - Kevin MacDonald
- Jewish Involvement in the Psychoanalytic Movement (<http://www.kevinmacdonald.net/chap4.pdf>) - Kevin MacDonald

- [How a Fabrication Differs from a Lie](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v22/n08/mikkel-borch-jacobsen/how-a-fabrication-differs-from-a-lie) (<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v22/n08/mikkel-borch-jacobsen/how-a-fabrication-differs-from-a-lie>)
- [Freud & Women: Freud's Perspective on Women](https://aboutpsych.blogspot.com/2012/07/freud-women-freuds-perspective-on-women.html) (<https://aboutpsych.blogspot.com/2012/07/freud-women-freuds-perspective-on-women.html>)
- [Sigmund Freud: Scientific Trailblazer or Huckster?](https://codoh.com/library/document/sigmund-freud-scientific-trailblazer-or-huckster/en/) (<https://codoh.com/library/document/sigmund-freud-scientific-trailblazer-or-huckster/en/>)

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